

THE AMERICAN NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 5, Vol. XXXI.]

MAY, 1857.

[Whole No. 385.]

SERMON DCCIX.

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ESCAPE FOR THY LIFE.

"And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee; neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."—GENESIS xix. 17.

In the brief and simple history of the early ages of the world, contained in the books of Moses, there are several signal instances of divine judgments, overwhelming the workers of iniquity. One of the most memorable of these, is the destruction of Sodom, and the neighboring cities, by a storm of fire from heaven. The spot now covered by the Dead Sea, was once a fruitful and well-watered plain; "even as the garden of the Lord." It was the dwelling-place of Lot, who was righteous before God. But the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly. Having purposed to destroy the city and its inhabitants, he sent two of his angels to bring Lot forth from the place, and save him from the approaching desolation.

When the morning arose, the angels hastened Lot, saying, "Arise, lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city." And while he lingered, they laid hold upon his hand; the Lord being merciful to him; and they brought him forth, and set him without the city; and He said, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee; neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

When the sun was risen upon the earth, the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone from heaven, and overthrew the cities of the plain, and all the inhabitants.

The sudden and remediless ruin of these devoted cities, is a

most impressive emblem of the hopeless perdition which awaits the ungodly in the future world. The apostle tells us, that Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth as an *example*, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. To every one, then, who is yet in his sins, and who has been warned of his danger, we may with great propriety say, as the angels did to Lot, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee; neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

I. You must escape for your *life*; the life, not of the body, but of the *soul*. The everlasting welfare of this is in danger; the soul which shall survive, when the earth shall have perished, and these heavens shall have vanished away; the soul, which, after ages of ages have rolled away, will still look forward to other ages beyond the power of numbers to express; the soul, which, through endless years, can be rising from one height of glory to another; or sinking deeper and deeper in wretchedness and guilt. To save it from perdition, you must come out from the city which is spiritually called Sodom; from the company of those who, by their iniquities, are provoking the execution of the divine threatenings.

The destruction to which you are exposed, if you do not escape in the way which he has shown you, is *inevitable*. It is made sure, by the word of him who cannot lie. Hath he said it, and will he not do it? The clearest demonstration can furnish no higher ground of certainty, than the word of the living God. I may escape *any* danger, rather than the punishment which he has purposed to inflict. I may fail to be crushed by the fall of the mountain rock; for he can suspend the law which brings it to the ground. I may come forth unhurt from the midst of the devouring fire, if He command the flame not to touch me. I may burst the inclosure of the tomb; and arise and walk abroad, if he give commission to the grave to resign its charge. But I cannot escape, except in his own appointed way, the punishment which he has declared he will inflict.

His threatenings are all directed against *sin*. This will forever be the abominable thing which his soul hateth. As long as he shall seek the prosperity of his vast and holy kingdom; as long as sin shall tend to mar the beauty, and order, and happiness of this kingdom; so long will he retain his abhorrence of the transgressors of his law; so long will he be a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity. How hopeless must be the prospect of the persevering sinner; when even the *goodness* of God requires that he should manifest his displeasure at those who, if permitted, would introduce discord and wretchedness among the joyful hosts of heaven. Can thine heart endure or thy hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee, saith the Lord. It will be more tolerable for even Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judg-

ment, than for those who perish from under the mercy and light of the gospel. The ruin to which you are exposed, if you continue in sin, will probably come upon you *suddenly*, and unexpected; as it did upon the inhabitants of Sodom. They did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; till it rained fire from heaven, and destroyed them all. At an hour when ye think not, the Son of man cometh. Most sinners are taken from the world, when they are far from expecting the summons of death.

Settle it then in your minds, that you *must* escape the hastening and tremendous doom of the finally impenitent. Come at once to the resolution, that whatever else you do, you *must* obtain an interest in the salvation of Christ.

2. But in what *way*, you may perhaps ask, is this deliverance to be effected? To this I answer, you must escape *yourselves*. Flee out of the midst of Babylon, says the prophet; and deliver every man his own soul. The ministers of Christ can warn the wicked of their danger, and urge them to flee from the approaching ruin; but cannot repent and believe in their stead. This, the sinner must do for himself: not indeed without divine assistance. While he works out his *own* salvation; it is God that worketh in him, to will and to do. Your attention must be earnestly directed to the *objects* of repentance and faith. You must have an *understanding* of the great truths upon which your salvation depends. You must know what it is, from which you are to escape; and where you are to look for safety. You must contemplate the evil nature of sin; that you may turn from it with abhorrence. You must learn what God requires you to do, that you may obey his commands. You must understand the way of salvation by Christ; that you may exercise faith in his name. You must actually repent, and believe, and obey.

3. You must be in *earnest* in seeking salvation. A few languid efforts will not answer the purpose. Escape for thy *life*. *Strive* to enter in at the strait gate, for many will seek to enter in, and will not be able. There are great *difficulties* to be encountered, in your way towards heaven. You will not overcome them without an arduous conflict. The evil propensities of your own hearts, the allurements and the frowns of the world, the persuasive influence of evil companions, will not be successfully resisted, without vigorous and determined efforts. Your pious friends earnestly desire your salvation; the angels in heaven will greatly rejoice at your repentance; evil men and the spirits of darkness are in earnest, to prevent you from entering on the way of holiness; God is in earnest, in his threatenings and his promises; Christ is in earnest in offering to save you; the Holy Spirit is in earnest, in warning you of your danger, and inviting you to accept of salvation; and will you not be in earnest to deliver your *own* soul?

The pressing earnestness demanded by the great interests of eternity, does not require such a *perturbation* of spirit, as is inconsistent with a distinct apprehension of religious truth. The man who attempts to escape from a dwelling in flames, should have self-possession enough to discern the right way of escape. The religion of the Bible, is a religion of the *understanding*, as well as of the heart. You ought not only to *feel* deeply, but to think rightly on the great truths upon which the salvation of your soul depends. Error may ruin you, as well as insensibility. Excitement is not all that is necessary to make a man a Christian. The hope of the *hypocrite* may be sustained, by erroneous opinions. Take opportunity, then, to search the scriptures, to meditate on them, to examine the state of your own heart, to compose your feelings with the demands of the law, and the spirit of the gospel. Let the impressions produced in the religious assembly be reviewed in the retirement of the closet.

4. In resolving to escape for your life, you must be prepared to make a sacrifice of everything which may stand in your way, in your progress towards heaven. The righteous judgment of God may overtake you in flight, if you suffer yourself to be obstructed or turned aside, by the alluring objects of the world. Whosoever there be of you, says Christ, that taketh not leave of all that he hath, cannot be my disciple. Renounce the pleasures, the honors, and the profits which endanger your salvation. Abandon them forever, rather than perish by their influence.

II. Let us next consider the *second* direction in the text. Look not behind thee. He who has once resolved to come out from a world lying in wickedness, ought to give up all thoughts of ever returning to its sinful enjoyments. Count the *cost* of becoming truly religious; and resolve, that whatever else you may lose, you will not incur the loss of your soul. Religion offers you a rich compensation, even in the *present* life, for all which you may be called upon to sacrifice. Will it not repay the loss of forbidden pleasures, to be relieved from the forebodings of an accusing conscience; to enjoy the hope of the pardon of your sins; to rejoice in the boundless perfection and government of God; to look forward to mansions of enduring blessedness, prepared for you in heaven? God is love. His goodness is unceasingly employed in providing for the happiness of those who put their trust in his name. We are assured that all things shall work together for their good. He that spared not his own son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not, with him also, freely give us all things?

2. Look not behind you, for the sake of your former *companions* in iniquity. If they remain where they have been, they will soon be overwhelmed in the ruin which you are called upon to escape. And will you consent to perish with them, rather than

forsake their society? "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you, and be a father unto you." And do you fear that you may be exposed to their ridicule? Do they sport with the interests of the eternal world? There can be no surer sign of infatuation. If you mingle with them, in their delirious merriment, you may be given over to the same hardness of heart which is hurrying them to perdition. Will it alleviate the terrors of the eternal prison, to find crowds of your companions in the same condemnation? Would you rather lose the bliss of heaven, than be separated from them?

3. Look not back, to relieve yourself from the painful sense of guilt which weighs upon your spirits. If you cannot bear the upbraidings of conscience *now*, how can you endure the remorse which will never end? Present distress on account of sin, may be necessary to induce you to forsake it. Cast not off this burden, in any other way, than by applying to him who heals the wounded spirit.

4. Look not behind you, lest you should never advance beyond your present position. Remember Lot's wife. When fleeing out of Sodom, she looked back upon the city; and there she was fixed, as a monument to all succeeding generations, of the danger of delaying and hesitating, when warned to escape from approaching destruction. Multitudes have followed her example; and like her, have been left of God, to perish where they were. They have never afterwards advanced a step towards heaven.

III. Let us now attend to the *third* direction in the text: Neither *stay* thou in all the plain. You are not only forbidden to indulge a thought of returning; but you are not even to remain where you are. Your case is one which will not admit of *delay*. It may be as fatal to you as a change of your purpose to escape.

1. Delay not, in hope of a *better opportunity*. This most treacherous of all the vain expectations of the sinner, has perhaps ruined more souls than every other delusion. Have you not already tried the experiment of postponing, and postponing repentance, till your case has become dangerous in the extreme? How *can* you have a better opportunity than the present moment? Will your heart grow less hard by perseverance in sin? Will the Holy Spirit be more ready to aid you, the longer you resist his influence? Will the offers of the gospel come to you with more easy conditions hereafter? Will there ever be an invitation better suited to your case than this: "Whosoever *will*, let him come and take of the water of life freely. Come, for all things are *now* ready. Let the wicked forsake his way; and let him return unto the Lord; who will have mercy upon him; he will *abundantly* pardon. Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread; and

your labor for that which satisfieth not. Incline your ear, and come unto me, saith the Lord; hear, and your soul shall live." Are you waiting for freer offers than these?

Your opportunity for escaping may be very short. Boast not of to-morrow. Trust not to it the vast concerns of an eternal state. The justice of heaven may slumber only till a *few* have escaped from the threatened ruin. The cloud over Sodom withheld its fires only till Lot and his family had fled. His other relatives had this short opportunity of saving themselves. No offers were made to them afterwards. By delay, nothing can be gained; all may be lost.

2. Stay not, relying upon your good *intentions*. No dependence is to be placed upon purposes of amendment which respect only the future. He who is sincere in his professions of reformation, enters upon the work immediately. That which is postponed, on the ground that it can be done at *any* time, is commonly *never* done. Have you not been intending and intending to become religious, till you yourself see that your intentions are not to be trusted?

3. Stay not, because you have *begun* to attend to the subject of religion. It is not enough, that your thoughts are turned to the great interests of eternity. The scriptures do not pronounce him to be safe, who has begun to *think* on the concerns of the soul. But he that *believeth* shall be saved. Lot would not have escaped the destruction from the Almighty, by merely *considering* the subject, without actually fleeing. We have reason to fear that many are now in the world of woe, who had occasionally thought much on the subject of religion. Stay not in *all* the plain. The storm of divine indignation will sweep over the whole. There is no middle ground, between a state of condemnation and a state of acceptance with God. He that is not with me, says Christ, is against me.

4. Stay not, though you have been brought to *feel* deeply on the subject of religion. Anxiety and alarm will not save you if they do not bring you to Christ. Conviction of *sin* will not save you if you do not come to the Saviour to deliver you from its guilt and its power. Your dread of the retributions of eternity will not save you, if you do not cast yourself upon the mercy of God in Christ. Venture not to remain where you are, relying on the strength of your convictions, your remorse, and your terrors. If they were to continue the same to your dying hour, they would not open for you an entrance into heaven. But there is no probability that your feelings *will* continue long, as they now are. Our constitution in the present life rarely admits of intense emotion for a great length of time. It is not in your power to secure the permanence of your present feelings. They certainly will *not* continue, if the influence of the Holy Spirit should be withdrawn from you. And have you not reason to

tremble lest this should be the case? He has called up your attention to the welfare of your soul, that you may be persuaded to embrace the salvation of the gospel. If you hesitate to obey his voice of mercy to you, he may depart from you, and leave you to yourself. And where will you be then? Far be it from me, to set limits to the grace and forbearance of God. But he hath said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man. He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy. You are surrounded with dangers on every side, except that from which your help must come. If you do not immediately turn to God, you may be left to entertain the hypocrite's hope, or you may take refuge from your anxiety in some destructive error, or you may be diverted from your seriousness, by thoughtless and profane companions; or you may gradually lose your impressions, and return to a more confirmed state of insensibility than you have ever before been left to. A benumbing and fatal *lethargy* may come over your soul.

5. Stay not where you are, waiting for *deeper feelings*, for a more thorough conviction of sin. You can *never* be converted, if you must *first* have a *full* comprehension of your guilt, of your danger, and of the salvation which you need. Who can carry his thoughts down through all the endless ages of suffering which are threatened to the finally impenitent? Whose feelings can reach the extent of the evil of sin committed against a God of unchangeable and boundless goodness? Who can duly estimate the worth of the soul, which is to rise to the blessedness of heaven, or perish forever?

But if you have *any* proper sense of the evil of sin, you can surely ask God to forgive you. If you have even a *faint* apprehension of what it is to lose your soul, you can rely on the mercy of Christ to deliver you. The *deepest* feeling will be as unavailing as the slightest, if you do not turn from sin to holiness. God does not require of you more painful convictions as the ground of your acceptance, when flying to the arms of his mercy. Whatever have been your past views, you are warranted *now* to come to him, with the feeling of the publican, God be merciful to me a sinner.

But do not suppose that the *whole* of religion consists in deep emotion. You are called upon, not only to *feel*, but to *act*, in the exercise of faith and repentance, to enter immediately upon a new and holy *life*. He that doeth righteousness, saith the Apostle, *is* righteous. *This* is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.

6. Stay not in your present condition, through *discouragement* and despondency. The man who is struggling to reach the shore, from a sinking ship, must not give way to disheartening suggestions. If he suspend his exertions he is lost.

But is it not proper that the impenitent sinner should be

brought to a state of despair? He ought to despair of delivering himself, by his own efforts *alone*, without the grace of God. On the other hand, he ought to despair of being saved, *without* efforts of his own. He ought to despair of laying God under *obligations* to him, by anything which he is doing, in a state of unbelief. He must despair of rendering himself acceptable to God, by any thing short of a compliance with the offers of the gospel. But he ought *not* to despair of the sufficiency of divine mercy to reach his case. He is called upon to *believe*, not to despond. Faith is the *opposite* of despair.

Are you dismayed at the mountains of your *guilt*? You can not lighten the insupportable load, by remaining in impenitence. You are daily *adding* to the fearful amount. But it is not too great for the atoning sacrifice of Christ to cover; not too great for the mercy of God to forgive. The very purpose for which the Son of God came down from heaven and expired on the cross was to save from sin. He is able to save unto the *utmost*, *all* that come unto God by him. Salvation is as freely offered to the greatest sinner as to the least. "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Do not waste your strength in dwelling *solely* on your guilt and your danger. Look also to the *remedy* which is provided. Fix your thoughts on the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ; on his willingness to receive you, if you come to him; on the readiness of the Father to welcome the returning prodigal. Let every distressing view of your guilt raise your desires to him who offers to wash you from your sins in his blood.

Are you disheartened, that you have, for a *long time*, been anxiously attending to religion, and have found no relief to your wounded spirit? Why, then, will you not *now* accept of the consolations of the gospel? Will it answer for you to stand here longer, putting away from you the offers of mercy, resisting the Spirit of grace, and hardening yourself in unbelief? The longer you have withstood the demands of conscience, the greater is the necessity of immediate compliance.

Are you ready to give up your case as *hopeless*, because you have tried every way to obtain relief which you can devise, and all to no purpose? Then are you the very person to apply instantly to the Saviour, who only can help you. He came to seek and to save those who are *lost*; those who are cut off from *all hope* of deliverance in any other way. The woman spoken of by the Evangelists, who for *twelve years* had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent *all that she had*, and was *nothing better*, but rather *grew worse*; as soon as she applied to Christ, was healed in that very hour, Jesus saying to her, Go in peace, thy *faith* hath made thee whole. What was this faith?

Simply renouncing all *other* dependence, and casting herself upon the power and mercy of Christ. Go thou and do likewise. Only say from the heart, "Lord save me, or I perish. Thou son of David have mercy on me."

Do you say, that if you only knew *how* to believe, you would do it at once; but that the way of coming to Christ is all a *mystery* to you? Is it a mysterious act, simply to ask to be forgiven and saved? When you know that you are a sinner deserving of punishment, is it a mystery frankly to *acknowledge* it? Is it a mystery to believe the word of him who cannot lie, inviting you to look unto him and be saved?

Is it not rather a mystery, that when you see yourself in imminent danger of perishing, and eternal life is offered to you freely, you will not even *accept* it? That when saints on earth, and angels in heaven, and your Maker and Redeemer stand ready to welcome you to their communion; your reluctance to yield to the call is too obstinately fixed to be overcome, except by the Spirit of all power and grace? That when God invites and entreats you to return and live, and even swears by himself that he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, you dare not trust yourself in his hands; dare not rely upon his offers of mercy?

Do you feel your danger to be so great, that you cannot bear to *look* at it? Turn your thoughts then, to the method of escape. Before you is at least a *hope* of deliverance. Behind you is nothing but the overwhelming flood, rolling rapidly towards you. Do not stand still, estimating the *amount* of your danger. The man who feels himself drowning does not spend his time in calculating the *chances* of escape. A bare *possibility* in his favor is sufficient to rouse him to the utmost effort. Remember, there is a long eternity before you. Count no exertions too great to obtain the crown of life immortal. Look *forward*, and look *upward*; forward to the work which you have to do; upward to the Saviour and the Spirit of grace, from whom your help must come. Look steadfastly at the mercy of the gospel. Here only is there *any* hope in your case.

But why talk of a mere *hope* of salvation? Why not, at once, make *sure* of eternal life? Only *give* yourself to Christ, and your danger is at an end. Take hold of the offer held out to you in the gospel, and you live forever. Only *rely* on the invitations of a God of infinite mercy and truth, and the foundation of your safety is as firm as the everlasting hills.

7. I would caution you, however, against remaining where you are, because you have begun to *hope* that you are a Christian. It is very far from being true, that the whole of religion consists in obtaining a hope. Sinners, who are awakened to a distressing apprehension of their guilt and their danger, naturally look forward to a time when they may be relieved from their anguish of mind by a hope of safety. They often hear such as are supposed to be

Christians, distinguished from sinners, by their *rejoicing in hope*. But although hope and joy are Christian graces, they are not the sum of religion. Let the righteous *rejoice* before God, yea, let them *exceedingly* rejoice. These are not the traits of character by which the *scriptures* commonly discriminate between the righteous and the wicked. We read often of the joy of the hypocrite, and of the hope of the hypocrite which shall perish. In that remarkable parable of the *sower*, given by our Saviour, for the express purpose of distinguishing between genuine and false conversions, it is said, they on the rock are they which, when they hear, receive the word with *joy*; but these have *no root*, and in time of temptation fall away. In the account of the seed on the *good ground*, nothing is said concerning joy. But *this* is the description: That on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, *keep* it, and bring forth *fruit*. What is the account given of the change wrought in Saul of Tarsus, that most surprising instance of the triumph of grace over deep-rooted depravity? We see him on his way to Damascus, a determined and furious persecutor. A few moments after we hear him crying out, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Almost the next thing said of him is, behold he prayeth. And a little after, it is added, He straightway preached Christ in the synagogues. So he went on, till his dying day, praying and preaching, and doing what the Lord would have him to do. This was the way in which *Paul* gave evidence of the genuineness of his conversion.

All the Christian affections may be counterfeited, but perhaps no one more easily or more frequently than hope and joy. He who has been deeply agitated with alarm, and is suddenly brought to think himself out of danger, will of course experience joy, whether the foundation of it be pious trust in God, or some delusion of a treacherous heart. Beware then, that you settle not down upon a groundless hope, to bring stupidity and death upon your soul. Let your religion, tried by scriptural evidence, be the foundation of your hope; and suffer not your hope to be the foundation of your religion. You may be in greater danger of this, from the fact that you frequently hear the expression "entertaining a hope," used as synonymous with conversion. If you understand by the term hope, in this case, nothing more than what *ought* to be meant by it; that you trust you see evidence in your heart of holy love, of penitence, faith, &c., then cautiously and prayerfully examine the nature of this evidence. Remember that the heart is deceitful above all things. Earnestly offer the petition. Lord search me and try me.

Thousands have deceived themselves to their eternal ruin. A hope which has not been tried by time, is in danger of being found to be delusive. Though it is our duty instantly to repent and obey; and though the *commencement* of a religious life must

always be instantaneous, yet it may not always be in our power immediately to *know* whether we have truly repented. Do you rest your hope on this, that you are counted by *others* in the list of converts? God has given to no man the power of drawing definitely the line, as his all-seeing eye draws it, between the two classes of the holy and the unholy. He has left the *tares* to grow together with the wheat, till harvest. Do you ask, How shall I avoid the danger of self-deception? Principally by *going forward*, in the way of your duty. Endeavor to obtain from day to day, clearer and more affecting views of the perfections of God; of his majesty, his justice, his holiness, and his mercy. Search the scriptures intently, that you may learn more and more of the demands of the law, and the provisions of the gospel. Look deeper into your own heart, that you may see more of the fountain of depravity from which you need to be delivered. Let your thoughts dwell on the character of Christ, that you may see more of his sufficiency and willingness to save. Look farther and farther into the eternal world, that you may feel more deeply the worth of the soul, and the danger of entertaining through life, a delusive hope of salvation.

Are you distressed with *doubts*, with respect to the genuineness of your conversion? Then examine your heart carefully, and compare its feelings with what is required in the word of God. But do not rely *principally* on self-examination. The performance of your duty in future, does not depend altogether on your knowing whether you are at this time a christian. Whether you have ever truly repented or not, do it *now*, and every day of your life. The established Christian has reason for exercising the same feelings of penitence, submission, and trust in the Saviour, which are required of the unconverted sinner.

But do not look solely to your *feelings* for evidence of your christian character. Take for you guide the *scriptural* rule; the *fruits* of righteousness; that is, right feelings connected with right conduct. *He* is a Christian indeed, who leads a Christian *life*.

Do you object, that it will require *time* to determine the real state of your heart, by bringing forth the *fruits* of godliness? It is vastly more important that you come to a *right* decision on this momentous question, than that you decide it immediately. It is far safer to *take time* to try yourself by the *scriptural* rule; than to incur the hazard of self-deception, for want of opportunity to apply this rule. Do not act upon the principle, that you must first *know* that you are a Christian, before you can enter upon a Christian life. You are bound to decide to *be* a Christian; but it does not follow of course, that you are to decide instantly that you are a Christian.

If the hope which you entertain be *well-founded*; if it be built upon scriptural evidence; it can be maintained in no other way,

than by still pressing forward. The *hypocrite's* hope may be held fast through life; though his negligence and worldliness are manifest to all but himself. But the real Christian, if he becomes careless and slothful, falls into darkness and doubt. He cannot long rest upon his *past* experience, without the present performance of his duty. His heavenly Father will hold from him the token of his favor, till he returns to penitence and active obedience.

To every one I would say then, whether you be an awakened sinner or a hoping convert; whether you be a doubting or a rejoicing Christian; remain not where you are; look not behind thee; neither stay thou in *all* the plain. Do not suppose that the sum of religion consists in *beginning* to be religious. From this time forward, with increasing earnestness and firmness of purpose, press into the kingdom of God. Daily, bring eternity nearer and nearer to your view, till you enter upon its unalterable allotments. Never remit your conflict with remaining depravity, till your triumph over sin is complete at death. Advance in the knowledge of God and his works, till you are admitted to the immediate presence of his glory in heaven. Exercise stronger and stronger faith in the Saviour, till you see him as he is, on his throne of universal dominion. Stay not in your course till your feet stand on the hill of the heavenly Zion; and you join in the song of victory and eternal salvation.

HYMN.

Ye who despise the Saviour's grace,
And scorn his gospel here,—
How can you meet his angry face,
Or at his bar appear?

When every earthly hope shall fail,—
When storms of wrath are nigh,
How will your souls affrighted quail,
Beneath his burning eye!

Why will you madly rush on death,
And force your way to woe?
Why tempt the God, that holds your breath,
To strike the fatal blow?

Turn, guilty sinners! quickly turn;
Oh! come to Jesus now;—
Ere the fierce flames around you burn,
To your Redeemer bow,—H. K. W. BEMAN.

SERMON DCCVIII.

BY REV. EBER CARPENTER,

NEW YORK.

THE ANGELS' VISIT TO LOT.

"And there came two angels to Sodom at even."—GENESIS xix. 1.

ONE can hardly restrain the desire in reading this narrative, to know something more of those angelic beings whose visible ministry was the privilege of the righteous in olden times. There is something so enchanting in the idea of angels—their form and mien; their light and airy motion; their purity and serenity; their intimacy with the spirit-world, and the benefits of their friendships, that we deem ourselves almost suffering a bereavement in their concealment from our open vision! We have an aching sense of our fallen state, while shut out from paradise, and feel ourselves to be cut off from that visible communion that might have been the prerogative of a sinless state. It may be no mere fancy of his, who sung of "Paradise Lost" that

"Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep!"

but because we are no longer innocent and holy, they are "hidden from our eyes!" We cannot say, as Adam to Eve—

"How often from steep
Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard
Celestial voices to the midnight air,
Sole, or responsive each to other's note,
Singing their great Creator? Oft in bands
While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,
With heavenly touch of instrumental sounds
In full harmonic number joined, their songs
Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to heaven."

How unlike that primitive communion was this sudden and startling visit to Lot! *Now*, they come, not because the scene is paradisiacal, and they would re-create themselves among the abodes of earthly bliss, but their errand is one of alarm. They come to separate "the precious from the vile"—to drive out the old man from the home of his love, and bid him flee for his life. And yet there is benignity in their address. It is compassion for that righteous man who had been so long vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, that led them at even-tide to the gate of Sodom.

Let us draw, if we can, some practical instruction from the narrative which our text introduces—"And there came two angels to Sodom at even."—And

I. The danger attendant upon a good man in whatever condition.

There is an appalling interest connected with the judgments of God in olden times, growing out of the fact that some good man for a while seems about to be involved in the common doom. At least we see him in such an atmosphere of wickedness, that nothing but a divine interposition can save him. One righteous man dwelt in Sodom. We cannot say he was wise in going there. Whatever of worldly advantage he gained by pitching his tent toward Sodom, it was offset by a fearful increase of temptation, and the exposure of those he loved to all the pollutions of the place. There is proof indeed that Lot maintained his integrity, and did what he could to stem the tide of iniquity which came in like a flood. "He sat in the gate of Sodom," perhaps as a magistrate, and rebuked the impious crew who neither feared God, nor regarded man. But still he was in peril. He was cut off in a great measure from communion with the good. There were none but his own family that sympathised with him in his godly sorrow, and even they were of too easy virtue to encourage him in his fidelity to God. The event proved how hardly he escaped the common ruin. He was "saved so as by fire." I know not but that horrible tempest was as necessary to *save* Lot as to burn out and engulf the infernal abominations of Sodom. Well, we call this an extreme case of spiritual peril. It would be the prayer of all our hearts, "lead us not into such a temptation." Are we quite sure that the style of our temptation is an improvement on the grosser and more palpable enticements that beset Lot? The very heinousness and un-disguise of wickedness in some of our modern Sodoms might affect us with an intense repulsion, and *shock us* into the keeping of our hearts with all diligence. But we much mistake our own virtue, if we deem it a thing of easy growth in any climate. Whatever of refinement may have softened the hideousness of depravity in most Christian communities, though it may measurably serve as a barrier to open abomination, becomes nevertheless to an unguarded heart the witchery which ensnares. A decent regard to public opinion may keep a man from known haunts of vice, when yet he is yielding every day to softer beguilements, and suffering his soul to be led captive by a silken chain. The sad declensions of some, perhaps good men, have had their beginning generally within the circle of refinement, where impurity asked us no more than easy compliances—a wanton look, or a double meaning, or a hidden lewdness.

"Should vicious pleasure take an angel form,
And at a distance rise by slow degrees,

Treacherous to wind herself into your heart,
 Stand firm aloof, nor let the gaudy phantom
 Too long allure your gaze nor tempt your thoughts,
 In slavery to sense."

It cannot be too much considered by any one of us, that we are most in spiritual peril, when a pleasant prosperity suffers us to let down the strictness of our watch. Any condition of life is dangerous to the soul that does not awaken a vigorous resistance to temptation. The world may let us alone in our piety, and demand of us no crying apostasy from Christ; but if this beguiles us into an easy sense of security, we are more fatally tempted than though Apollyon met us in his proper *fiendship*. If I were to name what seems to me the peculiar peril of Christians of our own day, and in our own land, it would be something corresponding to Bunyan's picture of "the enchanted ground." "I then saw in my dream, that they went on until they came into a certain country whose air naturally tended to make one drowsy, if he came a stranger into it. And here Hopeful began to be very dull, and heavy to sleep; wherefore he said unto Christian, I do now begin to grow so drowsy that I can scarcely hold open mine eyes; let us lie down here and take one nap." What is that state of easy drowsy security which so often beguiles us, but the fatal air of the world so dangerous to Christian souls. What but the lulling breeze and sweet, bewitching radiance of that scene where Lot sat at even tide in the gate of Sodom. Perchance our dearest friends sporting in that glow of the setting sun, and they and we so happy, there cannot be so great a peril. And yet what *latent* danger is hidden under that soft tranquillity—who knows? I tell thee, happy Lot, thou art slumbering on a spot where the fire shall fall, and thou must awake, or sleep the sleep of death.

II. *Religious contemplation as a security to the soul.*

It was evening when the angels came to Sodom, and Lot sat in the gate. There might have been a double purpose in his frequenting that spot at such a time. It was, perhaps, to see if any stranger needed his hospitality, and to refresh his spirit in that calm hour of Nature's repose. He would get away from the giddy throng of worldlings, and the stifled air of the city, and sitting where he could look out over the plain of Jordan and drink in the fragrance of Nature's distilling, lift up his soul to God and a purer world. Weary and heart-sick, doubtless he was, with the pollutions of the guilty city, and gladly would he have welcomed under his roof any way-faring man in whom he might find a kindred spirit. It was when thus "on hospitable thoughts intent," and musing upon a final release from vile society, that the two illustrious strangers drew near. There was no indication who they were, or why they came. They were doubtless two of the three who appeared unto Abraham in the heat of the day, with one of

whom, as the angel of the covenant, he made that remarkable intercession. But I know not that Lot apprehended their heavenly birth; however with majestic mien they drew near. *This* is the happy thought, however, that in his pious and pressing hospitality he was "entertaining angels unawares." Others saw them beside Lot, but as though their sensual hearts had sealed their eyes to the beauty and dignity of the noble strangers, *they* gave them no welcome. Hell was stirring them up rather to a baser crime, and "unawares" they were preparing to insult celestial spirits. It was the terrible necessity to which Lust compelled them, that they should commit the *last sin*, which (as Foster says) "breaks through into eternity, with all the past sins rushing after it." Shall we not then be justified in suggesting that we are safe from our spiritual enemies only as we give ourselves much to religious contemplation, and entertain with an urgent hospitality all holy influences? It was not a mere accident that the angels went in under Lot's roof. Though God designed his deliverance, He carried the miracle no farther than the necessity demanded. As if to try the faith of the good man, the angels seem at first to decline his invitation—"Nay, but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly." What have we here, my brethren, but an encouragement to fervor and importunity in the approaches we make to the mercy-seat, and in the entertainment we offer to our spiritual guests. We do know by actual experience what one little season of holy musing often does to purify and elevate our souls—how the calm and worship of the Sabbath not seldom carries us away from all our distractions and sorrows into the sweet sunlight of our eternal home. We have gone out perhaps at even-tide, and in the communings of our hearts with God, forgotten the meaner things that had too often led us astray. It was then we felt, with a sad repulsion, what sordid pleasures were beguiling the wicked to ruin.

"On what a slippery steep
The thoughtless wretches go;
And Oh! that dreadful fiery deep
That waits their fall below."

But if there be a saving power in the occasional retirements of the soul to religious musing, how much more shall we wall about with fire, and keep off the contagion of the world, by an habitual seclusion of the heart in the domain of faith! If a man's home and family are his safeguard from the temptations of vice and crime, by giving him something better to love; what shall be the divine protection of that man, who finds at nightfall, by holy instinct, that other home, where the dear household of christian affection gathers, and immortal guests beguile his weariness, and invisible minstrels charm his spirit to rest? I love that term of the Quietists, "Interior Life," and I cannot but think it would be

better for Christians, if they knew by a deeper experience, what it means. Our safeguard is not so much from *without*, as from *within*. We may multiply all external excitements, and defences of the heart—make a man a flaming, noisy, religionist, but such an one will be easily tempted of the devil; while he has no strength from *within*, gained by the nourishment of his soul on God. Spiritual life and vigor, come by feeding upon the “hidden manna,”—the constant assimilation in the spirit of the bread of heaven. “Above all,” says Paul, “taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” Now faith is nothing more or less than such an apprehension of spiritual things as makes them real. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It is such a contemplation of that which is “unseen and eternal,” as serves to open our spirit-eye, and show us, like Elisha’s servant, the mountains round about, full of horses and chariots of fire.

III.—*The method of the Divine interposition.*

What a perfect charm there is in the narrative, when the angels show such an affectionate solicitude for the righteous man! “And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him; and they brought him forth and set him without the city.” Surely this may well be called *visible providence*—the *literal* fulfilment of the promise, “He shall give his angels charge over thee.” But though we see now no such palpable ministry, how often there may be in a good man’s life, interpositions as critical—protections as mighty, as though we saw the encampments of celestial spirits round about the righteous. Who knows what legions of heavenly attendants keep watch and ward over the saint, or how, when assaulted by his spiritual foes, “they fight from heaven” for him; or when Satanic power sits close at the ear of his soul, whispering hellish temptations, some mighty Ithuriel starts him up with the point of his spear into his own proper ugliness? It may not be permitted us to know *just how* and *when* the ministering spirits perform their office; but we need not doubt, that their labor of love corresponds with the emergency of our case; and that such ethereal defences are afforded us, as our unseen enemies make necessary. The *fact* of Divine interposition is what we ought to be assured of, so far as we ourselves have this testimony, that we please God. My argument would be this—if under one dispensation, God employed angels and visible signs and providences in behalf of good men; He will under any dispensation, interpose in behalf of the righteous, to protect them in the hour of danger, and employ such agencies to effect their deliverance as are appropriate to their case. If it be said, that having given us a revelation and a rational soul, all that is needed to ensure our safety is obedience

to known laws; that God will not interpose to save us by a miracle; I grant that we have no right to expect anything *supernatural* where we violate nature; but I would nevertheless, invigorate a good man's heart with this persuasion, "If I strive humbly to do God's will, and seek His gracious protection, He will in some way keep me in the hour of temptation, and deliver me from the evil." Now you may work it all out, if you will, and try to show that the good man has no more interposition in his behalf, than what comes of *natural laws*. You may say that it is "the order of nature" that "none shall harm us, if we be followers of that which is good;" but if *in your mind and heart* that be not a *divine* order, so that God is instant in it, and above it, if need be, then I say, you have got a heartless speculation merely, and not the Christian's faith. "Just as if the order of nature had been constituted by some other and greater Being, and intrusted to the Almighty to be administered under an obligation, never to suspend for a moment the fixed laws." I confess myself yet to be so weak, if you will, that I cannot sit down with a philosophic composure, in the hour of spiritual peril, and wait for what will come as an iron necessity. I remember the words of Christ to Peter—"Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not;" and then I think, that if there was a way to keep Peter from utter apostasy; if Christ could thwart the arts of Satan by any agency, there must be some weapons in God's armory that will suit my case; and I will ever go to Him like a little child, and ask Him to keep me from falling. There is no faith that I would instil into a child's heart so carefully as this: *God has a peculiar care and guardianship over all who love Him and do His will*. I would read this story of Lot and the angels with this end in view, that he might have the actual proof of divine protection wrought out before him, and be assured that God had ways of delivering him out of temptations, as truly as though He sent his angels to do it.

Our religious faith in the household never rises into such a beauty and sublimity before the eyes of our children, as when in our prayers and conversation, we approach the style of those men of olden times, who like Abraham could go to the mount of sacrifice, with an unshaken confidence, that God would fulfil his promise even when He appeared about to break it most cruelly. Their strongest defence of virtue and piety is laid in the conviction, that God will cause all things to work together for good to them that love Him—that in keeping His commands there is a great reward—that there is no spot where duty calls them, or temptation assails them, where if they maintain their integrity, they will not find a great legion of heavenly guardians, and even their enemies to be at peace with them.

IV.—*The separation which is to take place when the Divine interposition is rejected.*

I do not know but one reason why we are not powerfully affected by the prospect of a final separation of the righteous and the wicked ; that is, it does not often take place in a sudden and awful visitation of wrath. The angels do not before our eyes, lead out the good man to the city of refuge, while their retreating steps are the signal for the slumbering fires to fall. No marked and violent crisis of doom generally appals our hearts, when Eternal Justice takes the wicked out of the world. He dies perhaps in his bed, with all the decencies of friendship about him—nay, *his* very pillow may be smoothed by the hand of piety, and his mother's heart of faith may devise all sweet appliances to subdue him, in that sad hour, to a penitent cry for mercy. We are not shocked by any such visible display of the Divine vengeance, as that which marks the vale of Siddim. But we do greatly mistake if we are so deceived by appearances, as to think a man can die, rejecting a more than angelic ministry—refusing the interposition of the Lord of angels, and not be as terribly cut off from the true believers as those whom Lot left behind. I would fain persuade those who now see no line of separation drawn—who may even feel somewhat complacent, that their friendships are intermingled with those of the Christian family, and thus be less alarmed as living under the roof of hallowed influences ; that yet it may be only the dullness of their spiritual faculties which apprehends no peril. You might not be left to deem your christian friend a mocker, who warns you of the wrath to come—you may even keep him company towards the city of refuge, so far as to get out of Sodom—but there may be such a love of this poor world still, that like Lot's wife, you will perish midway to the "Rock of Ages." "What an admonition" have we in that pillar of salt, "to the relatives of a pious person, to go the whole way with him to the eternal refuge!"

Christ never sounded a false alarm, but yet he tells us there is a greater guilt and a more fearful doom than Sodom's. That guilt is *his*, who wilfully or indifferently neglects the great salvation ; that doom is *his*, for whom "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins ; but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation." I would it were with us, my brethren, more often as with Lot, when the angels came to Sodom. Not indeed that they should be our guests for the last time, and the prophets of doom to those we love ; but, that their heavenly friendships and admonitions, might stir us to a solemn earnestness, in warning our kindred to flee from the wrath to come. What prophetic intimations of ruin to them are suggested to our own minds by every visitation of the celestial ones in our own musings at eventide. How often when the Spirit touches the soul, and graces her mean abode, are our eyes opened to see *their* peril, who never

gave entertainment to the great Comforter. Ah! when we are in the upper chamber of spiritual communion, and we hear the step of *His* presence, whom death could not hold, and He whispers, "Peace be unto you;" does it come over us with saddening power—where are those we love, who have followed us to the outer door of Faith, but have never lifted the latch to come in? By and by they shall begin to stand without, and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us—but its golden hinges shall no more swing open at mercy's bidding. Those white-winged ones shall have gone up, and Echo shall repeat the sound of their retreating footsteps, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still."

HYMN.

Lord! what a wretched land is this,
That yields us no supply,—
No cheering fruits, no wholesome trees,
Nor streams of living joy!

Long nights and darkness dwell below,
With scarce a twinkling ray:
But the bright world, to which we go,
Is everlasting day.

Our journey is a thorny maze,
But we march upward still,—
Forget the troubles of the ways,
And reach at Zion's hill.

See the kind angels at the gates,
Inviting us to come!
There Jesus, the forerunner, waits
To welcome travelers home.

There, on a green and flowery mount,
Our weary souls shall sit,
And, with transporting joys, recount
The labors of our feet.

Eternal glory to the King,
Who brought us safely through,
Our tongues shall never cease to sing,
And endless praise renew. —WATTS.